

silvery hair outlined clearly against the background of the sky—a sky now tenderly flushed with pink, like the inside of a delicate shell. When they could no longer perceive him they still rowed on, speaking no word—the measured, musical splash of the oars through the smooth, dark olive-green water alone breaking the stillness around them. There was a curious sort of hushed breathlessness in the air; fantastic, dream-like lights and shadows played on the little wrinkling waves; sudden flashes of crimson came and went in the western horizon, and over the high summits of the surrounding mountains mysterious shapes, formed of purple and gray mist, rose up and crept softly downward, winding in and out deep valleys and dark ravines, like wandering spirits sent on some secret and sorrowful errand. After a while Errington said, almost vexedly:

“Are you struck dumb, George? Haven’t you a word to say to a fellow?”

“Just what I was about to ask *you*,” replied Lorimer, carelessly, “and I was also going to remark that we hadn’t seen your mad friend up at the Guldmar residence.”

“No. Yet I can’t help thinking he has something to do with them, all the same,” returned Errington, meditatively. “I tell you he swore at me by some old Norwegian infernal place or other. I dare say he’s an Odin worshiper, too. But never mind him. What do you think of *her*?”

Lorimer turned lazily round in the boat, so that he faced his companion.

“Well, old fellow, if you ask me frankly, I think she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw, or, for that matter, ever heard of. And I am an impartial critic—perfectly impartial.” And, resting on his oar, he dipped the blade musingly in and out of the water, watching the bright drops fall with an oil-like smoothness as they trickled from the polished wood and glittered in the late sunshine like vari-colored jewels. Then he glanced curiously at Philip, who sat silent, but whose face was very grave and earnest—even noble, with that shade of profound thought upon it. He looked like one who had suddenly accepted a high trust, in which there was not only pride, but tenderness. Lorimer shook himself together, as he himself would have expressed it, and touched his friend’s arm half playfully.

“You’ve met the king’s daughter of Norway after all, Phil;” and his light accents had a touch of sadness in them; “and you’ll have to bring her home, as the old song says. I believe the ‘eligible’ is caught at last. The ‘woman’ of the piece has turned up, and your chum must play second-fiddle—eh, old boy?”

Errington flushed hotly, but caught Lorimer’s hand and pressed it with tremendous fervor.

“By Jove, I’ll wring it off your wrist if you talk in that fashion,

George!” he said, with a laugh. “You’ll always be the same to me, and you know it. I tell you,” and he pulled his mustache doubtfully, “I don’t know quite what’s the matter with me. That girl fascinates me! I feel a fool in her presence. Is that a sign of being in love, I wonder?”

“Certainly not!” returned George, promptly; “for I feel a fool in her presence, and I’m not in love.”

“How do you know that?” And Errington glanced at him keenly and inquiringly.

“How do I know? Come, I like that! Have I studied myself all these years for nothing? Look here,”—and he carefully drew out the little withering bunch of daisies he had purloined—“these are for you. I knew you wanted them, though you hadn’t the impudence to pick them up, and I had. I thought you might like to put them under your pillow, and all that sort of thing, because if one is resolved to become a love-lunatic, one may as well do the thing properly out and out—I hate all half-measures. Now if the remotest thrill of sentiment were in me, you can understand, I hope, that wild horses would not have torn this adorable posy from my possession! I should have kept it, and you would never have known of it,” and he laughed softly. “Take it, old fellow. You’re rich now, with the rose she gave you besides. What is all your wealth compared with the sacred preciousness of such blossoms! There, don’t look so awfully ecstatic, or I shall be called upon to ridicule you in the interests of common sense. Say you’re in love with the girl at once, and have done with it. Don’t beat about the bush!”

“I’m not sure about it,” said Philip, taking the daisies gratefully, however, and pressing them in his pocket-book. “I don’t believe in love at first sight!”

“I do,” returned Lorimer, decidedly. “Love is electricity. Two telegrams are enough to settle the business—one from the eyes of the man, the other from those of the woman. You and Miss Guldmar must have exchanged a dozen such messages at least.

“And you?” inquired Errington, persistently. “You had the same chance as myself.”

George shrugged his shoulders. “My dear boy, there are no wires of communication between the sun-angel and myself; nothing but a blank, innocent landscape, over which, perhaps, some day the mild luster of friendship may beam. The girl is beautiful—extraordinarily so; but I’m not a ‘man o’ wax,’ as Juliet’s gabbling old nurse says—not in the least impressionable.”

And forthwith he resumed his oar, saying briskly as he did so:

“Phil, do you know those other fellows must be swearing at us

pretty forcibly for leaving them so long with Dyceworthy. We've been away two hours!"

"Not possible!" cried Errington, amazed, and wielding his oar vigorously. "They'll think me horribly rude. By Jove, they must be bored to death!"

And, stimulated by the thought of the penance their friends were enduring, they sent the boat spinning swiftly through the water, and rowed as though they were trying for a race, when they were suddenly pulled up by a loud "Halloo!" and the sight of another boat coming slowly out from Bosekop, wherein two individuals were standing up gesticulating violently.

"There they are!" exclaimed Lorimer. "I say, Phil, they've hired a special tub, and are coming out to us."

So it proved. Duprez and Macfarlane had grown tired of waiting for their truant companions, and had taken the first clumsy wherry that presented itself, rowed by an even clumsier Norwegian boatman, whom they had been compelled to engage also, as he would not let his ugly punt out of his sight, for fear some harm might chance to befall it. Thus attended, they were on their way back to the yacht. With a few long, elegant strokes, Errington and Lorimer soon brought their boat alongside, and their friends gladly jumped into it, delighted to be free of the company of the wooden-faced mariner they had so reluctantly hired, and who now, on receiving his fee, paddled awkwardly away in his ill-constructed craft, without either a word of thanks or salutation. Errington began to apologize at once for his long absence, giving as a reason for it the necessity he found himself under of making a call upon some persons of importance in the neighborhood, whom he had till now, forgotten.

"My dear Phil-eep!" cried Duprez, in his cheery sing-song accent, "why apologize? We have amused ourselves! Our dear Sandy has a vein of humor that is astonishing! We have not wasted our time. No! We have made Mr. Dyceworthy our slave; we have conquered him; we have abased him! He is what we please—he is for all gods or for no god—just as we pull the string! In plain words, *mon cher*, that amiable religious is drunk!"

"Drunk!" cried Errington and Lorimer together. "Jove! you don't mean it?"

Macfarlane looked up with a twinkle of satirical humor in his deep-set gray eyes.

"Ye see," he said, seriously, "the *Lacrima*, or Papist wine, as he calls it, was strong—we got him to take a good dose o't—a vera fair dose indeed. Then, doun he sat, an' fell to convairsing vera pheelosophically o' mony things—it wad hae done ye gude to hear him—he was fair lost in the mazes o' his metapheesics, for twa flies took a bit saunter through the pleasant dewy lanes o' his forehead, an' he never raised a finger to send them awa' aboot them

beezeiness. Then I thoocht I wad try him wi' the whusky—I had ma pocket-flask wi' me—an oh, mon! he was sairly glad and gratefu' for the first snack o't! He said it was deevilish fine stuff, an' so he took ane drappikie, an' anither drappikie, and yet anither drappikie"—Sandy's accent got more and more pronounced as he went on—"an' after a bit, his heed dropt doun, an' he took a wee snoozle of a minute or twa—then he woke up in a' his strength an' just grappit the flask in his twa hands an' took the hale o't off at a grand, rousing gulp! Ma certes! after it ye shuld ha' seen him laughin' like a feekless fule, an' rubbin' an' rubbin' his heed, till his hair was like the straw kicked roond by a mad coo!"

Lorimer lay back in the stern of the boat and laughed uproariously at this extraordinary picture, as did the others.

"But that is not all," said Duprez, with delighted mischief sparkling in his wicked little dark eyes; "the dear religious opened his heart to us. He spoke thickly, but we could understand him. He was very impressive! He is quite of my opinion. He says all religion is nonsense, fable, imposture—Man is the only god, Woman his creature and subject. Again—man and woman conjoined, make up divinity, necessity, law. He was quite clear on that point. Why did he preach what he did not believe, we asked? He almost wept. He replied that the children of this world liked fairy-stories, and he was paid to tell them. It was his bread and butter—would we wish him to have no bread and butter? We assured him so cruel a thought had no place in our hearts! Then he is amorous—yes! the good fat man is amorous! He would have become a priest, but on close examination of the confessionals he saw there was no possibility of seeing, much less kissing, a lady penitent through the grating. So he gave up that idea! In his form of faith he *can* kiss, he says—he *does* kiss!—always a holy kiss, of course! He is so ingenuous—so delightfully frank—it is quite charming!"

They laughed again. Sir Philip looked somewhat disgusted.

"What an old brute he must be!" he said. "Somebody ought to kick him—a holy kick, of course, and therefore more intense and forcible than other kicks."

"You begin, Phil," laughed Lorimer, "and we'll all follow suit. He'll be like that Indian in 'Vathek' who rolled himself into a ball; no one could resist kicking as long as the ball bounded before them—we, similarly, shall not be able to resist, if Dyceworthy's fat person is once left at our mercy."

"That was a grand bit he told us, Errington," resumed Macfarlane. "Ye should ha' heard him talk about his love-affair!—the saft jelly of a man that he is, to be making up to ony woman."

At that moment they ran alongside of the "Eudalie" and threw up their oars.

"Stop a bit," said Errington. "Tell us the rest on board."

The ladder was lowered; they mounted it, and their boat was hauled up to its place.

"Go on!" said Lorimer throwing himself lazily into a deck arm-chair and lighting a cigar, while the others leaned against the yacht rails and followed his example, "Go on, Sandy—this is fun! Dyceworthy's amours must be amusing. I suppose he's after that ugly wooden block of a woman we saw at his house who is so zealous for the 'true gospel'?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Sandy, with immense gravity. "The auld Silenus has better taste. He says there's a young lass running after him, fit to break her heart about him—puir thing, she must have vera little choice o' men! He hasna quite made up his mind, though he admeets she's as fine a lass as ony man need require. He's sorely afraid she has set herself to catch him, as he says she's an eye like a warlock for a really strong, good-looking fellow like himself," and Macfarlane chuckled audibly. "May be he'll take pity on her, may be he won't; the misguided lassie will be sairly teased by him from a' he tauld us in his cups. He gave us her name—the oddest in a' the warld for sure—I canna just remember it."

"I can," said Duprez, glibly. "It struck me as quaint and pretty—Thelma Guldmar."

Errington started so violently and flushed so deeply that Lorimer was afraid of some rash outbreak of wrath on his part. But he restrained himself by a strong effort. He merely took his cigar from his mouth and puffed a light cloud of smoke into the air before replying, then he said, coldly;

"I should say Mr. Dyceworthy, besides being a drunkard, is a most consummate liar. It so happens that the Guldmars are the very people I have just visited—highly superior in every way to anybody we have yet met in Norway. In fact, Mr. and Miss Guldmar will come on board to-morrow. I have invited them to dine with us; you will then be able to judge for yourselves whether the young lady is at all of the description Mr. Dyceworthy gives of her."

Duprez and Macfarlane exchanged astonished looks.

"Are ye quite sure," the latter ventured to remark, cautiously, "that ye're prudent in what ye have done? Remember ye have asked no pairson at a' to dine with ye as yet—it's a vera sudden an' exceptional freak o' hospitality."

Errington smoked on peacefully and made no answer. Duprez hummed a verse of a French *chansonnette* under his breath and smiled. Lorimer glanced at him with a lazy amusement.

"Unburden yourself, Pierre, for Heaven's sake!" he said. "Your mind is as uncomfortable as a loaded camel. Let it lie down, while you take off its packages, one by one, and reveal their contents. In short, what's up?"

Duprez made a rapid, expressive gesture with his hands.

"*Mon cher*, I fear to displease Phil-eeep! He has invited these people; they are coming—*bien!* there is no more to say."

"I disagree with ye," interposed Macfarlane. "I think Errington should hear what *we* ha' heard; it's fair an' just to a mon that he should understand what sort o' folk are gaun to pairtake wi' him at his table. Ye see, Errington, ye should ha' thought a wee before inviting pairsons o' unsettled an' dootful chairacter—"

"Who says they are?" demanded Errington, half angrily. "The drunken Dyceworthy?"

"He was no sae drunk at the time he tauld us," persisted Macfarlane, in his most obstinate, most dictatorial manner. "Ye see, it's just this way—"

"Ah, *pardon!*" interrupted Duprez, briskly. "Our dear Sandy is an excellent talker, but he is a little slow. Thus it is, *mon cher* Errington. This gentleman named Guldmar had a most lovely wife—a mysterious lady, with an evident secret. The beautiful one was never seen in the church or in any town or village; she was met sometimes on hills, by rivers, in valleys, carrying her child in her arms. The people grew afraid of her; but, now, see what happens! Suddenly she appears no more; some one ventures to ask this Monsieur Guldmar: "What has become of madame?" His answer is brief. 'She is dead!' Satisfactory so far, yet not quite; for, madame being dead, then what has become of the corpse of madame? It was never seen—no coffin was ever ordered—and apparently it was never buried! *Bien!* What follows? The good people of Bosekop draw the only conclusion possible—Monsieur Guldmar, who is said to have a terrific temper, killed madame, and made away with her body. *Voilà!*"

And Duprez waved his hand with an air of entire satisfaction.

Errington's brow grew somber. "This is the story, is it?" he asked at last.

"It is enough, is it not?" laughed Duprez. "But, after all, what matter? It will be novel to dine with a mur—"

"Stop!" said Philip, fiercely, with so much authority that the sparkling Pierre was startled. "Call no man by such a name till you know he deserves it. If Guldmar was suspected, as you say, why didn't somebody arrest him on the charge?"

"Because, ye see," replied Macfarlane, "there was not sufficient proof to warrant such a proceeding. Moreover, the actual meenister of the parish declared it was a' richt, an' said this Guldmar was a mon o' vera queer notions, an', may be, had buried his wife wi' certain ceremonies peculiar to himself— What's wrong wi' ye now?"

For a light had flashed on Errington's mind, and with the quick comprehension it gave him, his countenance cleared. He laughed.

"That's very likely," he said; "Mr. Guldmar is a character. He

follows the faith of Odin, and not even Dyceworthy can convert him to Christianity!"

Macfarlane stared with a sort of stupefied solemnity.

"Mon!" he exclaimed, "you never mean to say there's an actual puir human creature that in this blessed, enlightened nineteenth century of ours is so far misguided as to worship the fearful gods o' the Scandinavian meethology?"

"Ah!" yawned Lorimer, "you may wonder away, Sandy, but it's true enough! Old Guldmar is an Odinite. In this blessed, enlightened nineteenth century of ours, when Christians amuse themselves by despising and condemning each other, and thus upsetting all the precepts of the Master they profess to follow, there is actually a man who sticks to the traditions of his ancestors. Odd, isn't it? In this delightful, intellectual age, when more than half of us are discontented with life and yet don't want to die, there is a fine old gentleman, living beyond the Arctic circle, who is perfectly satisfied with his existence—not only that, he thinks death the greatest glory that can befall him. Comfortable state of things altogether! I'm half inclined to be an Odinite too."

Sandy still remained lost in astonishment. "Then ye don't believe that he made awa' wi' his wife?" he inquired, slowly.

"Not in the least?" returned Lorimer, decidedly; "neither will you, to-morrow, when you see him. He's a great deal better up in literature than you are, my boy, I'd swear, judging from the books he has. And when he mentioned his wife, as he did once, you could see in his face he had never done *her* any harm. Besides, his daughter——"

"Ah! but I forgot," interposed Duprez again. "The daughter, Thelma, was the child the mysteriously vanished lady carried in her arms, wandering with it all about the woods and hills. After her disappearance, another thing extraordinary happens. The child also disappears, and Monsieur Guldmar lives alone, avoided carefully by every respectable person. Suddenly the child returns, grown to be nearly a woman—and, they say, lovely to an almost impossible extreme. She lives with her father. She, like her strange mother, never enters a church, town, or village—nowhere, in fact, where persons are in any numbers. Three years ago, it appears, she vanished again, but came back at the end of ten months, lovelier than ever. Since then she has remained quiet—composed—but always apart—she may disappear at any moment. Droll, is it not, Errington? and the reputation she has is natural!"

"Pray state it," said Philip, with freezing coldness. "The reputation of a woman is nothing nowadays. Fair game—go on!"

But his face was pale, and his eyes blazed dangerously. Almost unconsciously his hand toyed with the rose Thelma had given him, that still ornamented his buttonhole.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Duprez, in amazement. "But look not at

me like that! It seems to displease you, to put you *en fureur*, what I say! It is not my story—it is not I—I know not Mademoiselle Guldmar. But as her beauty is considered superhuman, they say it is the devil who is her *parfumeur*, her *coiffeur*, and who sees after her complexion; in brief, she is thought to be a witch in full practice, dangerous to life and limb."

Errington laughed loudly, he was so much relieved.

"Is that all?" he said, with light contempt. "By Jove! what a pack of fools they must be about here—ugly fools too, if they think beauty is a sign of witchcraft. I wonder Dyceworthy isn't scared out of his skin if he positively thinks the so-called witch is setting her cap at him."

"Ah, but he means to convairt her," said Macfarlane, seriously. "To draw the evil oot o' her, as it were. He said he wad do't by fair means or foul."

Something in these latter words struck Lorimer, for, raising himself in his seat, he asked: "Surely Mr. Dyceworthy, with all his stupidity, doesn't carry it so far as to believe in witchcraft?"

"Oh, indeed he does," exclaimed Duprez; "he believes in it *à la lettre!* He has Bible authority for his belief. He is very firm—firmest when drunk!" And he laughed gayly.

Errington muttered something not very flattering to Mr. Dyceworthy's intelligence, which escaped the hearing of his friends; then he said:

"Come along, all of you, down into the saloon. We want something to eat. Let the Guldmars alone; I'm not a bit sorry I've asked them to come to-morrow. I believe you'll all like them immensely."

They all descended the stairway leading to the lower part of the yacht, and Macfarlane asked, as he followed his host:

"Is the lass vera bonny, did ye say?"

"Bonny's not the word for it this time," said Lorimer, coolly, answering instead of Errington. "Miss Guldmar is a magnificent woman. You never saw such a one, Sandy, my boy; she'll make you sing small with one look; she'll wither you up into a kippered herring! And as for you, Duprez," and he regarded the little Frenchman critically, "let me see—you *may* possibly reach up to her shoulder—certainly not beyond it."

"*Pas possible!*" cried Duprez. "Mademoiselle is a giantess."

"She needn't be a giantess to overtop you, *mon ami*," laughed Lorimer, with a lazy shrug. "By Jove, I *am* sleepy, Errington, old boy; are we never going to bed? It's no good waiting till it's dark here, you know."

"Have something first," said Sir Philip, seating himself at the saloon table, where his steward had laid out a tasty cold collation. "We've had a good deal of climbing about and rowing; it's taken it out of us a little."

Thus hospitably adjured, they took their places, and managed to dispose of an excellent supper. The meal concluded, Duprez helped himself to a tiny liquor glass of Chartreuse, as a wind-up to the exertions of the day, a mild luxury in which others joined him, with the exception of Macfarlane, who was wont to declare that a "mon without his whisky was nae mon at a'," and who, therefore, persisted in burning up his interior mechanism with alcohol, in spite of the doctrines of hygiene, and was now absorbed in the work of mixing his lemon, sugar, hot water, and poison—his usual preparation for a night's rest.

Lorimer, usually conversational, watched him in abstracted silence. Rallied on this morose humor, he rose, shook himself like a retriever, yawned, and sauntered to the piano that occupied a dim corner of the saloon, and began to play with that delicate, subtle touch which, though it does not always mark the brilliant pianist, distinguishes the true lover of music, to whose ears a rough thump on the instrument or a false note would be most exquisite agony. Lorimer had no pretense to musical talent; when asked he confessed he could "strum a little," and he hardly seemed to see the evident wonder and admiration he awakened in the minds of many to whom such "strumming" as his was infinitely more delightful than more practiced, finished playing. Just now he seemed undecided—he commenced a dainty little prelude of Chopin's, then broke suddenly off, and wandered into another strain, wild, pleading, pitiful and passionate—a melody so weird and dreamy that even the stolid Macfarlane paused in his toddy-sipping, and Duprez looked round in some wonderment.

"*Comme c'est beau, ça!*" he murmured.

Errington said nothing; he recognized the tune as that which Thelma had sung at her spinning-wheel, and his bold bright eyes grew pensive and soft as the picture of the fair face and form rose up again before his mind. Absorbed in a reverie, he almost started when Lorimer ceased playing, and said, lightly:

"By-bye, boys! I'm off to bed! Phil, don't wake me so abominably early as you did this morning. If you do, friendship can hold out no longer—we must part."

"All right!" laughed Errington, good-humoredly, watching his friend as he sauntered out of the saloon; then seeing Duprez and Macfarlane rise from the table, he added, courteously, "Don't hurry away on Lorimer's account, you two. I'm not in the least sleepy—I'll sit up with you to any hour."

"It is droll to go to bed in broad daylight," said Duprez. "But it must be done. *Cher Philippe*, your eyes are heavy. 'To bed, to bed,' as the excellent Madame Macbeth says. Ah! *quelle femme!* What an exciting wife she was for a man! Come, let us follow our dear Lorimer—his music was delicious. Good-night or good-

morning? I know not which it is in this strange land where the sun shines always. It is confusing."

They shook hands and separated. Errington, however, unable to compose his mind to rest, went into his cabin merely to come out of it again and betake himself to the deck, where he decided to walk up and down till he felt sleepy. He wished to be alone with his own thoughts for awhile—to try and resolve the meaning of this strange new emotion that possessed him—a feeling that was half pleasing, half painful, and that certainly moved him to a sort of shame. A man, if he be strong and healthy, is always more or less ashamed when love, with a single effort, proves him to be weaker than a blade of grass swaying in the wind. What! all his dignity, all his resoluteness, all his authority swept down by the light touch of a mere willow wand? for the very sake of his own manhood and self-respect, he cannot help but be ashamed. It is as though a little nude, laughing child mocked at a lion's strength and made him a helpless prisoner with a fragile daisy chain. So the god Eros begins his battles, which end in perpetual victory—first fear and shame—then desire and passion—then conquest and possession. And afterward? ah!—afterward the pagan deity is powerless—a higher God, a grander force, a nobler creed must carry love to its supreme and best fulfillment.

CHAPTER VIII.

Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
M'a rendu fou!

VICTOR HUGO.

It was half an hour past midnight. Sir Philip was left in absolute solitude to enjoy his meditative stroll on deck, for the full radiance of light that streamed over the sea and land was too clear and brilliant to necessitate the attendance of any of the sailors for the purpose of guarding the "Eulalie." She was safely anchored and distinctly visible to all boats or fishing craft crossing the fjord, so that unless a sudden gale should blow, which did not seem probable in the present state of the weather, there was nothing for the men to do that need deprive them of their lawful repose. Errington paced up and down slowly, his yachting shoes making no noise, even as they left no scratch on the spotless white deck, that shone in the night sunshine like polished silver. The fjord was very calm—on one side it gleamed like a pool of golden oil in which the outline of the "Eulalie" was precisely traced, her delicate masts and spars and drooping flag being drawn in black lines on the yellow water as though with a finely pointed pencil. There was a curious light in the western sky; a thick bank of clouds,

dusky brown in color, were swept together and piled one above the other in mountainous ridges that rose up perpendicularly from the very edge of the sea-line, while over their dark summits a glimpse of the sun, like a giant's eye, looked forth, darting dazzling descending rays through the sullen smoke-like masses, tinging them with metallic green and copper hues as brilliant and shifting as the bristling points of lifted spears. Away to the south a solitary wreath of purple vapor floated slowly as though lost from some great mountain height, and through its faint, half-disguising veil the pale moon peered sorrowfully, like a dying prisoner lamenting joy long past, but unforgotten.

A solemn silence reigned, and Errington, watching the sea and sky, grew more and more absorbed and serious. The scornful words of the proud old Olaf Guldmar rankled in his mind and stung him. "An idle trifler with time—an aimless wanderer!" Bitter, but, after all, true. He looked back on his life with a feeling akin to contempt. What had he done that was at all worth doing? He had seen to the proper management of his estates—well! any one with a grain of self-respect and love of independence would do the same. He had traveled and amused himself—he had studied languages and literature—he had made many friends, but after all said and done, the *bonde's* cutting observations had described him correctly enough. The do-nothing, care-nothing tendency, common to the very wealthy in this age, had crept upon him unconsciously; the easy, cool, indifferent nonchalance common to men of his class and breeding was habitual with him, and he had never thought it worth while to exert his dormant abilities. Why, then, should he now begin to think it was time to reform all this—to rouse himself to an effort—to gain for himself some honor, some distinction, some renown that should mark him out as different to other men? why was he suddenly seized with an insatiate desire to be something more than a mere "mushroom knight, a fungus of nobility," why? if not to make himself worthy of—ah! There he had struck a suggestive key-note. Worthy of what? of whom? There was no one in all the world, excepting perhaps Lorimer, who cared what became of Sir Philip Errington, Baronet, in the future, so long as he would, for the present, entertain and feast his numerous acquaintances and give them all the advantages, social and political, his wealth could so easily obtain. Then why, in the name of well-bred indolence, should he muse with such persistent gloom, on his general unworthiness at this particular moment? Was it because this Norwegian maiden's grand blue eyes had met his with such beautiful trust and candor?

He had known many women, queens of society, titled beauties, brilliant actresses, sirens of the world with all their witcheries in full play, and he had never lost his self-possession or his heart; with the loveliest of them he had always felt himself master of the

situation, knowing that in their opinion he was always "a catch," "an eligible," and, therefore, well worth winning. Now, for the first time, he became aware of his utter insignificance—this tall, fair goddess knew none of the social slang—and her fair, pure face, the mirror of a fair, pure soul, showed that the "eligibility" of a man from a pecuniary point of view was a consideration that would never present itself to her mind. What she would look at would be the man himself—not his pocket. And, studied from such an exceptional height—a height seldom climbed by modern marrying women—Philip felt himself unworthy. It was a good sign; there are great hopes of any man who is honestly dissatisfied with himself. Folding his arms, he leaned idly on the deck-rails and looked gravely and musingly down into the motionless water, where the varied hues of the sky were clearly mirrored, when a slight, creaking, cracking sound was heard, as of some obstacle grazing against or bumping the side of the yacht. He looked, and saw, to his surprise, a small rowing boat close under the gunwale, so close, indeed, that the slow motion of the tide heaved it every now and then into a jerky collision with the lower frame-work of the "Eulalie"—a circumstance which explained the sound which had attracted his attention. The boat was not unoccupied—there was some one in it lying straight across the seats, with face turned upward to the sky—and, walking noiselessly to a better post of observation, Errington's heart beat with some excitement as he recognized the long, fair, unkempt locks and eccentric attire of the strange personage who had confronted him in the cave—the crazy little man who had called himself "Sigurd." There he was, beyond a doubt, lying flat on his back with his eyes closed. Asleep or dead? He might have been the latter—his thin face was so pale and drawn—his lips were so set and colorless. Errington, astonished to see him there, called, softly:

"Sigurd! Sigurd!" There was no answer. Sigurd's form seemed inanimate—his eyes remained fast shut.

"Is he in a trance?" thought Sir Philip, wonderingly; "or has he fainted from some physical exhaustion?"

He called again, but again received no reply. He now observed in the stern of the boat a large bunch of pansies, dark as velvet, and evidently freshly gathered—proving that Sigurd had been wandering in the deep valleys and on the sloping sides of the hills, where these flowers may be frequently found in Norway during the summer. He began to feel rather uncomfortable, as he watched that straight, stiff figure in the boat, and was just about to swing down the companion-ladder for the purpose of closer inspection, when a glorious burst of light streamed radiantly over the fjord—the sun conquered the masses of dark cloud that had striven to conceal his beauty—and now, like a warrior clad in golden armor, surmounted and trod down his enemies, shining

forth in all his splendor. With that rush of brilliant effulgence, the apparently lifeless Sigurd stirred—he opened his eyes, and as they were turned upward, he naturally, from his close vicinity to the side of the “Eulalie,” met Errington’s gaze fixed inquiringly and somewhat anxiously upon him. He sprang up with such sudden and fierce haste that his frail boat rocked dangerously, and Philip involuntarily cried out:

“Take care!”

Sigurd stood upright in his swaying skiff and laughed scornfully.

“Take care!” he echoed, derisively. “It is you who should take care! You—poor miserable moth on the edge of a mad storm! It is you to fear—not I! See how the light rains over the broad sky. All for me! Yes, all the light, all the glory for me; all the darkness, all the shame for you!”

Errington listened to these ravings with an air of patience and pitying gentleness, then he said, with perfect coolness:

“You are quite right, Sigurd! You are always right, I am sure. Come up here and see me; I won’t hurt you! Come along!”

The friendly tone and gentle manner appeared to soothe the unhappy dwarf, for he stared doubtfully, then smiled—and finally, as though acting under a spell, he took up an oar and propelled himself skillfully enough to the gangway, where Errington let down the ladder and with his own hand assisted his visitor to mount, not forgetting to fasten the boat safely to the steps as he did so. Once on deck, Sigurd gazed about him perplexedly. He had brought his bunch of pansies with him, and he fingered their soft leaves thoughtfully. Suddenly his eyes flashed.

“You are alone here?” he asked, abruptly.

Fearing to scare his strange guest by the mention of his companions, Errington answered simply:

“Yes, quite alone just now, Sigurd.”

Sigurd took a step closer toward him. “Are you not afraid?” he said, in an awe-struck, solemn voice.

Sir Philip smiled. “I never was afraid of anything in my life!” he answered.

The dwarf eyed him keenly. “You are not afraid,” he went on, “that I shall kill you?”

“Not in the least,” returned Errington, calmly. “You would not do anything so foolish, my friend.”

Sigurd laughed. “Ha, ha! you call me ‘friend.’ You think that word a safeguard! I tell you, no! There are no friends now; the world is a great field of battle—each man fights the other. There is no peace—none anywhere! The wind fights with the forests; you can hear them slashing and slaying all night long—when it is night—the long, long night! The sun fights with the

sky, the light with the dark, and life with death. It is all a bitter quarrel; none are satisfied, none shall know friendship any more; it is too late! We cannot be friends!”

“Well, have it your own way,” said Philip good-naturedly, wishing that Lorimer were awake to interview this strange specimen of human wit gone astray; “we’ll fight if you like. Anything to please you!”

“We *are* fighting,” said Sigurd, with intense passion in his voice. “You may not know it; but I know it! I have felt the thrust of your sword; it has crossed mine. Stay!” and his eyes grew vague and dreamy. “Why was I sent to seek you out—let me think—let me think!”

And he seated himself forlornly on one of the deck chairs and seemed painfully endeavoring to put his scattered ideas in order. Errington studied him with a gentle forbearance; inwardly he was very curious to know whether this Sigurd had any connection with the Guldmars, but he refrained from asking too many questions. He simply said, in a cheery tone:

“Yes, Sigurd—why did you come to see me? I’m glad you did; it’s very kind of you, but I don’t think you even know my name.”

To his surprise, Sigurd looked up with a more settled and resolved expression of face, and answered almost as connectedly as any sane man could have done.

“I know your name very well,” he said, in a low, composed manner. “You are Sir Philip Errington, a rich English nobleman. Fate led you to *her* grave—a grave that no strange feet have ever passed, save yours—and so I know you are the man for whom her spirit has waited—she has brought you hither. How foolish to think she sleeps under the stone, when she is always awake and busy—always at work opposing me! Yes, though I pray her to lie still, she will not!”

His voice grew wild again, and Philip asked, quietly:

“Of whom are you speaking, Sigurd?”

His steady tone seemed to have some compelling influence on the confused mind of the half-witted creature, who answered, readily and at once:

“Of whom should I speak but Thelma? Thelma, the beautiful rose of the northern forest—Thelma—”

He broke off abruptly with a long shuddering sigh, and rocking himself drearily to and fro, gazed wistfully out to the sea. Errington hazarded a guess as to the purpose of that coffin hidden in the shell cavern.

“Do you mean Thelma living?—or Thelma dead?”

“Both,” answered Sigurd, promptly. “They are one and the same—you cannot part them. Mother and child—rose and rosebud! One walks the earth with the step of a queen, the other

floats in the air like a silvery cloud; but I see them join and embrace and melt into each other's arms till they unite in one form fairer than the beauty of angels! And you—you know this as well as I do—you have seen Thelma, you have kissed the cup of friendship with her; but remember!—not with me—not with me!"

He started from his seat, and, running close up to Errington, laid one meager hand on his chest.

"How strong you are—how broad and brave!" he exclaimed, with a sort of childish admiration. "And can you not be generous too?"

Errington looked down upon him compassionately. He had learned enough from his incoherent talk to clear up what had seemed a mystery. The scandalous reports concerning Olaf Guldmar were incorrect—he had evidently laid the remains of his wife in the shell-cavern, for some reason connected with his religious belief, and Thelma's visits to the sacred spot were now easy of comprehension. No doubt it was she who placed fresh flowers there every day, and kept the little lamp burning before the crucifix, as a sign of the faith her departed mother had professed, and which she herself followed. But who was Sigurd, and what was he to the Guldmars? Thinking this, he replied to the dwarf's question by a counter-inquiry.

"How shall I be generous, Sigurd? Tell me! What can I do to please you?"

Sigurd's wild blue eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Do!" he cried. "You can go away, swiftly, swiftly over the seas, and the Alten Fjord need know you no more! Spread your white sails!" and he pointed excitedly up to the tall tapering masts of the "Eulalie." "You are king here. Command and you are obeyed! Go from us, go! What is there here to delay you? Our mountains are dark and gloomy—the fjelds are wild and desolate—there are rocks, glaciers and shrieking torrents that hiss like serpents gliding into the sea! Oh, there must be fairer lands than this one—lands where ocean and sky are like twin jewels set in one ring—where there are sweet flowers and fruits and bright eyes to smile on you all day—yes! for you are as a god in your strength and beauty—no woman will be cruel to you! Ah! say you will go away!" and Sigurd's face was transfigured into a sort of pained beauty as he made his appeal. "That is what I came to seek you for—to ask you to set sail quickly and go, for why should you wish to destroy me? I have done you no harm as yet. Go!—and Odin himself shall follow your path with blessings!"

He paused, almost breathless with his own earnest pleading. Errington was silent. He considered the request a mere proof of the poor creature's disorder. The very idea that Sigurd seemed

to entertain of his doing him any harm, showed a reasonless terror and foreboding that was simply to be set down as caused by his unfortunate mental condition. To such an appeal there could be no satisfactory reply. To sail away from the Alten Fjord and its now most fascinating attractions, because a madman asked him to do so, was a proposition impossible of acceptance, so Sir Philip said nothing. Sigurd, however, watching his face intently, saw, or thought he saw, a look of resolution in the Englishman's clear, deep gray eyes—and with the startling quickness common to many whose brains, like musical instruments, are jarred, yet not quite unstrung, he grasped the meaning of that expression instantly.

"Ah! cruel and traitorous!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "You will not go; you are resolved to tear my heart out for your sport? I have pleaded with you as one pleads with a king, and all in vain—all in vain! You will not go? Listen, see what you will do," and he held up the bunch of purple pansies, while his voice sunk to an almost feeble faintness. "Look!" and he fingered the flowers, "look!—they are dark and soft as a purple sky—cool and dewy and fresh; they are the thoughts of Thelma; such thoughts! So wise and earnest, so pure and full of tender shadows!—no hand has grasped them rudely, no rough touch has spoiled their smoothness! They open full-faced to the sky, they never droop or languish; they have no secrets, save the marvel of their beauty. Now you have come, you will have no pity—one by one you will gather and play with her thoughts as though they were these blossoms—your burning hand will mar their color—they will wither and furl up and die, all of them—and you—what will you care? Nothing! no man ever cares for a flower that is withered—not even though his own hand slew it."

The intense melancholy that vibrated through Sigurd's voice touched his listener profoundly. Dimly he guessed that the stricken soul before him had formed the erroneous idea that he, Errington, had come to do some great wrong to Thelma or her belongings, and he pitied the poor creature for his foolish self-torture.

"Listen to me, Sigurd," he said, with a certain imperativeness; "I cannot promise you to go away, but I can promise that I will do no harm to you or to—Thelma. Will that content you?"

Sigurd smiled vacantly and shook his head. He looked at the pansies wistfully and laid them down very gently on one of the deck benches.

"I must go," he said in a faint voice: "she is calling me."

"Who is calling you?" demanded Errington, astonished.

"She is," persisted Sigurd, walking steadily to the gangway.

"I can hear her! There are the roses to water, and the doves to feed, and many other things." He looked steadily at Sir Philip, who, seeing he was bent on departure, assisted him to descend the

companion-ladder into his little boat. "You are sure you will not sail away?"

Errington balanced himself lightly on the ladder and smiled.

"I am sure, Sigurd! I have no wish to sail away. Are you all right there?"

He spoke cheerily, feeling in his own mind that it was scarcely safe for a madman to be quite alone in a cockle-shell of a boat on a deep fjord, the shores of which were indented with dangerous rocks as sharp as the bristling teeth of fabled sea-monsters, but Sigurd answered him almost contemptuously.

"All right!" he echoed. "That is what the English say always. All right! As if it were ever wrong with me and the sea! We know each other—we do each other no harm. *You* may die on the sea, but *I* shall not! No, there is another way to Valhalla!"

"Oh, I dare say there are no end of ways," said Errington, good-temperedly, still poising himself on the ladder, and holding on to the side of his yacht, as he watched his late visitor take the oars and move off. "Good-bye, Sigurd! Take care of yourself! Hope I shall see you again soon."

But Sigurd replied not. Bending to the oars, he rowed swiftly and strongly, and Sir Philip, pulling up the ladder and closing the gangway, saw the little skiff flying over the water like a bird in the direction of the Guldmar's landing-place. He wondered again and again what relationship, if any, this half-crazed being bore to the *bonde* and his daughter. That he knew all about them was pretty evident; but how? Catching sight of the pansies left on the deck bench, Errington took them, and, descending to the saloon, set them on the table in a tumbler of water.

"Thelma's thoughts, the poor little fellow called them," he mused, with a smile. "A pretty fancy of his, and linked with the crazy imaginings of Ophelia too. 'There's pansies, that's for thoughts,' *she* said, but Sigurd's idea is different; he believes they are Thelma's own thoughts in flower. 'No rough touch has spoiled their smoothness,' he declared; he's right there, I'm sure. And shall I ruffle the sweet leaves? shall I crush the tender petals? or shall I simply transform them from pansies into roses—from the dream of love into love itself?"

His eyes softened as he glanced at the drooping rose he wore, which Thelma herself had given him, and as he went to his sleeping cabin, he carefully detached it from his buttonhole, and taking down a book—one which he greatly prized, because it had belonged to his mother—he prepared to press the flower within its leaves. It was the "Imitation of Christ," bound quaintly and fastened with silver clasps, and as he was about to lay his fragrant trophy on the first page that opened naturally of itself, he glanced at the words that there presented themselves to his eyes.

"Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing

higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or in earth!" And with a smile, and a warmer flush of color than usual on his handsome face, he touched the rose lightly yet tenderly with his lips and shut it reverently within its sacred resting-place.

CHAPTER IX.

Our manners are infinitely corrupted, and wonderfully incline to the worse; of our customs, there are many barbarous and monstrous.—MONTAIGNE.

THE next day was very warm and bright, and that pious Lutheran divine, the Rev. Charles Dyceworthy, was seriously incumbered by his own surplus flesh material, as he wearily rowed himself across the fjord toward Olaf Guldmar's private pier. As the perspiration bedewed his brow, he felt that Heaven had dealt with him somewhat too liberally in the way of fat—he was provided too amply with it ever to excel as an oarsman. The sun was burning hot, the water was smooth as oil, and very weighty—it seemed to resist every stroke of his clumsily wielded blades. Altogether it was hard, uncongenial work—and, being rendered somewhat flabby and nerveless by his previous evening's carouse with Macfarlane's whisky, Mr. Dyceworthy was in a plaintive and injured frame of mind. He was bound on a mission—a holy and edifying errand, which would have elevated any minister of his particular sect. He had found a crucifix with the name of Thelma engraved thereon—he was now about to return it to the evident rightful owner, and in returning it he purposed denouncing it as an emblem of the "Scarlet Woman, that sitteth on the Seven Hills," and threatening all those who dared to hold it sacred as doomed to eternal torture, "where the worm dieth not." He had thought over all he meant to say; he had planned several eloquent and rounded sentences, some of which he murmured placidly to himself as he propelled his slow boat along.

"Yea!" he observed, in a mild sotto-voce—"ye shall be cut off root and branch! Ye shall be scorched even as stubble—and utterly destroyed." Here he paused and mopped his streaming forehead with his clean, perfumed handkerchief. "Yea!" he resumed, peacefully, "the worshipers of idolatrous images are accursed; they shall have ashes for food and gall for drink! Let them turn and repent themselves, lest the wrath of God consume them as straw whirled on the wind. Repent!—or ye shall be cast into everlasting fire. Beauty shall avail not, learning shall avail not, meekness shall avail not; for the fire of hell is a searching, endless, destroying—" here Mr. Dyceworthy, by plunging one oar with too much determination into the watery depths, caught a